

# THE URBAN COMMERCIAL OVERLAY



PROMOTING PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE CITY OF COLUMBUS, OHIO



City of Columbus    Department of Development    Planning Division

## INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, the city of Columbus began to recognize that existing pedestrian-oriented development patterns were being threatened by suburban-style redevelopment. The existing zoning code was partly to blame; its development standards did not accommodate or encourage the unique architectural character typical of older, urban commercial corridors. Therefore, the Columbus Planning Division and the Columbus Neighborhood Design Assistance Center worked collaboratively to develop a new zoning overlay that would impose alternative, urban development standards - the *Urban Commercial Overlay* (UCO). In February 1999, Columbus City Council adopted the UCO and established 12 overlay districts. Since then, the UCO has been applied to more than 20 corridors and intersections.

## PURPOSE OF THE UCO

The UCO regulates development in specifically designated areas to protect, re-establish and retain the unique architectural characteristics of older, urban commercial corridors. The provisions of the UCO are intended to encourage pedestrian-oriented design typified by retail display windows, reduced building setbacks, rear parking lots, and ornamental walls and fences. Where applied, the UCO standards generally require full compliance for new construction, partial compliance for exterior building additions and alterations, and minimal or no compliance for routine maintenance or the replacement in-kind of materials.



*Milo's on West Broad St.*

## OVERLAY DISTRICTS

All of the UCO districts are located within six miles of downtown Columbus. Most are linear and confined to the parcels that have frontage along major thoroughfares. The existing inventory of districts includes portions of North High Street, South High Street, Indianola Avenue, West Broad Street, South Front Street, Main Street, Cleveland Avenue, Parsons Avenue, East Long Street, North Fourth Street, Livingston Avenue, Mt. Vernon Avenue and East Third Avenue. Additional districts have been created in historic neighborhoods such as Italian Village and near The Ohio State University campus. In total,

the city's UCO districts covers more than 14 miles. New districts are created through the city's rezoning process and typically initiated by the Planning Division.



*UCO district along Third Avenue.*



*The Donato's Pizza restaurant on North High St. features a zero set-back, large windows and a corner entrance.*



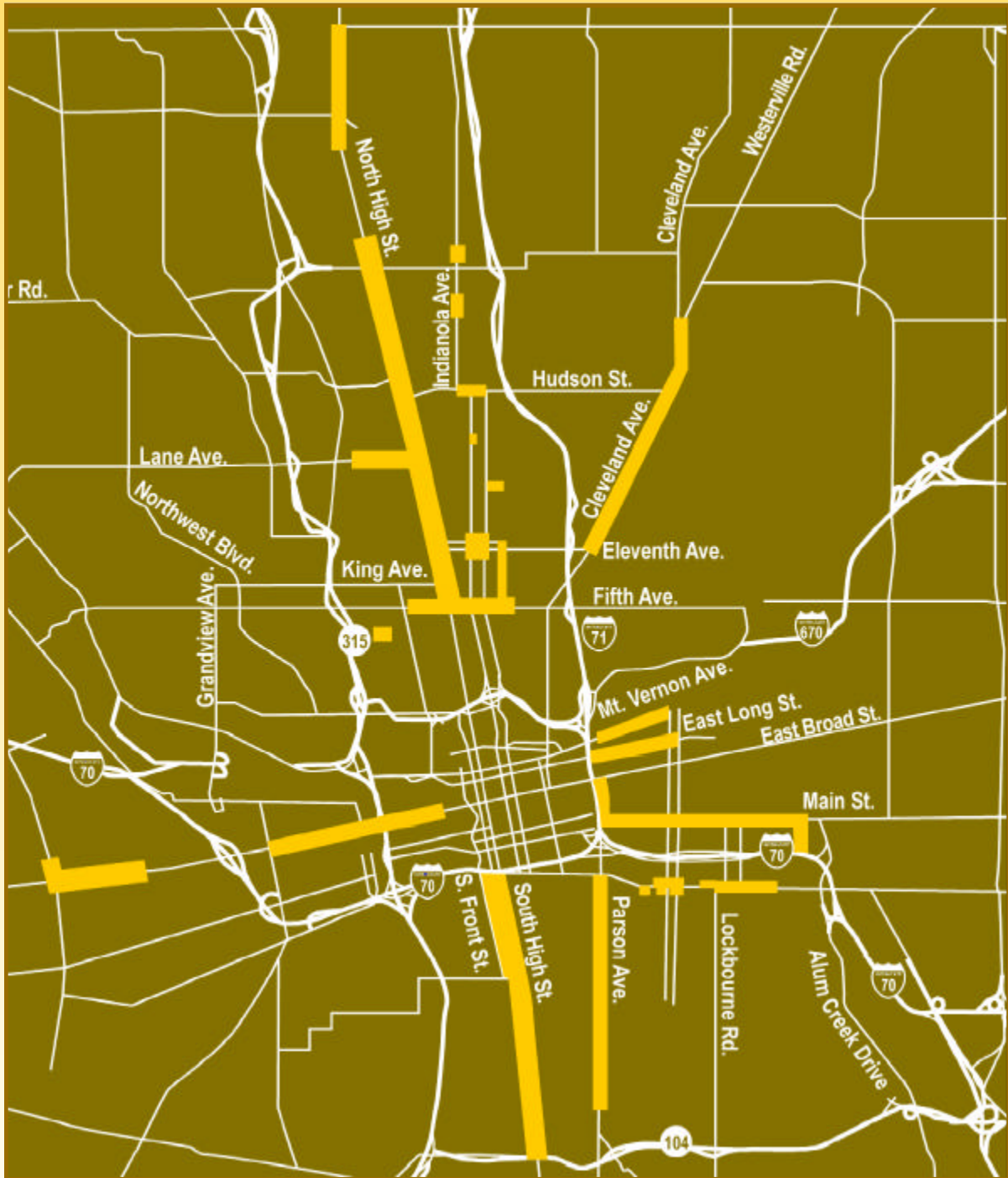
## RECENT PROJECTS



*The Cup O' Joe coffee house on North High Street blends turn-of-the-century proportions with contemporary detailing. Outdoor seating areas and large windows are pedestrian-friendly.*



*Brewers' Yard was completed in the spring of 2002. This mixed-use project incorporates pedestrian-scale site elements and a large off-street parking area situated at the rear of the property.*



Location of Overlays

*These boundaries are correct as of October 2005. Please verify boundaries on [www.columbusinfobase.org](http://www.columbusinfobase.org)*



*Creative Paints is located on North High Street just south of Morse Road in the Beechwood area of Clintonville. Parking is located at the rear of the store and it has an entrance off the street.*



**3372.601 DEFINITIONS.**

**Building Frontage:** "Building frontage" means the side, or facade, of a building closest to and most nearly parallel to an abutting street.

**Building Frontage, Primary:** "Primary building frontage" means a building frontage that abuts a street listed as a primary street in the applicable Overlay Areas subsection of this chapter.

**Building Frontage, Secondary:** "Secondary building frontage" means a building frontage that abuts an alley or a street not listed as a primary street in the applicable Overlay Areas subsection of this chapter.

**Building Rear:** "Building rear" means the wall or plane opposite the primary building frontage. For a building on a corner lot, the building rear is the wall or plane opposite the wall or plane containing the principal building entrance.

**Drive-Thru:** "Drive-thru" means a building or portion thereof that, by design, permits customers to receive goods or services while remaining in a motor vehicle.

**Parking Lot:** "Parking lot" means any off-street public or private area, under or outside of a building or structure, designed and used for the temporary storage of motor vehicles.

**Principal Building:** "Principal building" means a building in which the principal use of the property is conducted. All parcels containing at least one building shall be deemed to have a principal building. A parcel may contain more than one principal building.

**Public-Private Setback Zone:** "Public-private setback zone" means an area between a principal building and a public street right-of-way line utilized for seating, outdoor dining, public art and/or other pedestrian amenities.

**Reconstruction:** "Reconstruction" means the replacement or rebuilding of a building, premises or structure.

**Setback:** "Setback" means the distance between a lot line or right-of-way line and a building, structure, defined outdoor area serving as the primary activity, parking lot, or vehicular circulation area.

### **3372.603 PURPOSE.**

The purpose of the *Urban Commercial Overlay* (UCO), consisting of Columbus City Code Sections 3372.601 through 3372.699, inclusive, is to regulate development in specifically designated areas in order to protect, re-establish and retain the unique architectural and aesthetic characteristics of older, urban commercial corridors. Such corridors are typically characterized by pedestrian-oriented architecture, building setbacks ranging from 0-10 feet, rear parking lots, commercial land uses, a street system that incorporates alleys and lot sizes smaller than 0.5 acre. The provisions of the UCO are intended to encourage pedestrian-oriented development featuring retail display windows, reduced building setbacks, rear parking lots, and other pedestrian-oriented site design elements. Where applied, UCO standards generally require full compliance for new construction, partial compliance for exterior building additions and alterations and minimal or no compliance for routine maintenance and the replacement in-kind of materials.

### **3372.605 DESIGNATED AREAS.**

The boundaries of designated UCO areas are part of the Official Zoning Map and described in separate sections beginning with C.C. 3372.650 and ending with C.C. 3372.699. For the purposes and requirements of an Urban Commercial Overlay area, the term "primary street" means:

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Third Avenue     | Hudson Street     |
| Fourth Street    | Lane Avenue       |
| Fifth Avenue     | Livingston Avenue |
| Fifth Street     | Long Street       |
| Broad Street     | Main Street       |
| Cleveland Avenue | Mt. Vernon Avenue |
| Front Street     | Parsons Avenue    |
| Indianola Avenue | Summit Street     |
| High Street      |                   |



### **3372.607 APPLICABILITY AND EXTENT.**

The standards and requirements of the UCO apply as follows:

- A. On a commercially-zoned or commercially-used property within a designated UCO area:
  - 1. the placement, construction, or reconstruction of a principal building is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter;
  - 2. the expansion of a principal building's gross floor area by up to 50% is subject to C.C. 3372.611 and 3372.613 and the expansion of a principal building's gross floor area by more than 50% is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter;
  - 3. the extension or expansion of a principal building towards a public street is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter; and
  - 4. exterior alteration of a primary building frontage is subject to C.C. 3372.611 and 3372.613.  
Secondary building frontages and primary building frontages set back from an abutting street a distance of more than 30 feet are exempt from this requirement. For purposes of this requirement, the placement of window shutters, fabric canopies and awnings and/or building-mounted signage is not considered to be exterior alteration.
- B. The construction or installation of parking lots, fences and other accessory structures on commercially-zoned or commercially-used properties shall comply with C.C. 3372.609 B. and C., 3372.611, 3372.613, and 3372.615.
- C. The installation of new on-site lighting must comply with C.C. 3372.612.
- D. The standards and requirements of this Chapter may be waived for buildings officially recognized as historic if they would result in an unacceptable modification of the original, historic appearance of the building as determined by the City of Columbus Historic Resources Commission.
- E. Residentially-zoned properties and residences are exempt from the standards and requirements of this Chapter, except in architectural review commission districts.
- F. In architectural review commission districts, residences, residentially-zoned properties and commercially-zoned or commercially-used properties are subject to C.C. 3372.615, 3372.612 and 3372.609, excepting 3372.609 B, and are not subject to Sections 3372.611 and 3372.613.
- G. Routine maintenance and in-kind replacement of materials are exempt from the standards and requirements of this Chapter.

The standards contained in the UCO are in addition to the regulations of the underlying zoning districts. Where the provisions of this Chapter conflict with those of the underlying zoning district or other provisions of this Zoning Code, the most restrictive provision applies.

### **3372.609 SETBACK REQUIREMENTS.**

Setback requirements are as follows:

- A. The minimum building setback is zero (0) feet and the maximum building setback is ten (10) feet, except where a Public-Private Setback Zone is provided. Where a Public-Private Setback Zone is provided, a maximum setback of fifteen (15) feet is permitted for up to 50% of the building frontage.
- B. The minimum setback for parking lots is five (5) feet. Parking lots and accessory buildings shall be located at the rear of the principal building. Where access to the rear of the property is not possible from a public alley or street, up to 50% of the parking may be located at the side of the principal building.
- C. The minimum setback for fences and masonry or stone walls is zero (0) feet.

### **3372.611 DESIGN STANDARDS.**

Design standards are as follows:

- A. A primary building frontage shall incorporate at least one main entrance door. At a building corner where two primary building frontages meet, one main entrance door may be located so as to meet the requirement for both building frontages.
- B. A building frontage that exceeds a width of 50 feet shall include vertical piers or other vertical visual elements to break the plane of the building frontage. The vertical piers or vertical elements shall be spaced at intervals of 15 feet to 35 feet along the entire building frontage.
- C. For each primary building frontage, at least 60% of the area between the height of two feet and ten feet above the nearest sidewalk grade shall be clear/non-tinted window glass permitting a view of the building's interior to a minimum depth of four feet. For a secondary building frontage, the pattern of window glass shall continue from the primary frontage a minimum distance of ten feet.

- D. The standards below apply to upper story windows. They recognize that regularly spaced upper story windows (any story above ground) create a repeated pattern for unity and are an integral part of the building design. Upper story windows are generally smaller than storefront windows at street level, are spaced at regular intervals and give scale and texture to the street edge formed by building facades.
  - 1. For any new installation or replacement of upper story windows, the new/replacement windows must be clear/non-tinted glass.
  - 2. Windows must not be blocked, boarded up, or reduced in size, unless otherwise required by Code for securing a vacant structure.
  - 3. At least 25% of the second and third floor building frontages (as measured from floor to ceiling) must be window glass. This requirement may be waived if historic documentation (e.g. historic photos) from when the building was first constructed can be provided that shows a different percentage of window glass was used on the second and third floor building frontages. In such cases, the historic percentage must be maintained.
- E. All roof-mounted mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view to the height of the equipment. The design, colors and materials used in screening shall be architecturally compatible with the rooftop and the aesthetic character of the building.
- F. Dumpsters and all ground-mounted mechanical equipment shall be located at the rear of the building and screened from public view to the height of the dumpster/equipment.
- G. Fences, with or without masonry piers, shall be decorative and constructed of ornamental metal tubes or solid metal bars. Fences may not exceed a height of four feet. Chain-link fences are not permitted.
- H. Masonry or stone walls may be used for screening, sitting, or used as independent architectural elements. Walls may not exceed a height of four feet.



- I. Parking lots must be screened from all abutting public streets. In architectural review commission districts, required parking lot screening will be the screening approved by the architectural review district commissions. In all other areas, parking lot screening shall consist of either:
  - 1. a four-foot high solid masonry or stone wall; or
  - 2. a four-foot high decorative metal tube or solid metal bar fence located at the street right-of-way line (property line), with or without masonry pier supports, with a minimum three foot wide land-scaped area along the parking lot side of the fence. The landscaped area must be planted with three evergreen shrubs and one deciduous shade tree per 30 feet of frontage. Trees and shrubs must be maintained in good condition; dead material must be replaced within one year. Chain-link fences are not permitted.
- J. Commercial signage shall comply with C.C. 3375-3383. Billboard signs are not permitted.
- K. Backlit awnings are not permitted.

### **3372.612 SITE LIGHTING.**

Exterior lighting must be designed, located, constructed, and maintained to minimize light trespass and spill over off the subject property. To achieve this objective, the following are mandatory site lighting requirements:

- A. Area lighting fixtures must direct light downwardly, i.e. must be cut-off type fixtures.
- B. The height of any parking lot light pole/fixture must not exceed eighteen (18) feet above grade.
- C. Exterior building light fixtures must not generate excessive light levels, cause glare, or direct light beyond the facade onto neighboring property, streets, or the night sky. Strobe or flashing lights are not permitted.
- D. Security lighting must be from full cut-off type fixtures, shielded and aimed so that the light is directed to the area that is being protected by light.

### **3372.613 DRIVE-THRU USES.**

Drive-thru pickup windows and coverings are prohibited on primary building frontages and shall be attached to the rear or side of the principal building.

### **3372.615 PARKING AND CIRCULATION.**

Parking, access and vehicular circulation standards are as follows:

- A. Parking, stacking and circulation aisles are not permitted between a public street right-of-way line and a principal building.
- B. Additional curb cuts along streets identified in the Columbus Thoroughfare Plan will not be permitted unless the Division of Transportation staff determines that a new curb cut is the only means available to provide vehicular access to the site and that the new location of the curb cut meets the requirements of the Division of Transportation.
- C. The required number of off-street parking spaces may be reduced by up to 50% by the Chief Zoning Official or designee in consultation with the Division of Transportation staff. Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to: the availability of on-street, public, permit or shared parking; available transit service; pedestrian traffic and accessibility; elimination of arterial curb cuts; hours of operation and existing/proposed land use. The required number of loading spaces may be eliminated at the discretion of the Chief Zoning Official or designee, with due consideration given to: frequency and time of deliveries; size and nature of vehicles accommodated by the loading spaces; the character of the neighborhood; and impact upon adjoining streets or alleys.



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